



# consumer news

Office of Consumer Affairs  
Executive Office of the President Virginia H. Knauer, Director

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## New car: buy or lease?

The automobile is the consumer's second most important purchase—a house ranks No. 1—and is often a necessity. In 1971 alone, according to the *Commerce Dept. Survey of Current Business*, \$46.7 billion was spent on cars & their parts & another \$23.7 billion on gasoline & oil. Cars & car parts accounted for 7% of all consumer spending with gasoline accounting for an additional 4%.

What these figures mean in terms of your pocketbook is the subject of a *Transportation Dept.* study, *Cost of Operating an Automobile* (1972 edition). According to this study, the total cost of owning & operating a standard size car for 10 years is approximately \$13,553; a compact car \$10,808; & a subcompact car \$9,444. Depreciation is the largest single factor in these costs—32% for a standard size car, 24% for a compact car & 21% for a subcompact car. Other costs included in the *Transportation* figures are repairs, maintenance, replacement tires, accessories, gas & oil, insurance, parking, tools, taxes & fees.

To avoid some of these costs, many consumers have turned to an alternative to car buying—car leasing. Long term leases are now being offered by major car rental companies & many independent companies. Two types of leases are usually available: full service leases & net finance leases (names & details of leases may vary somewhat from company to company). Under the full service lease, the monthly rental charge includes repairs, maintenance, insurance, and replacement tires. Under the net finance lease, you pay all the same costs as if you owned the car except the initial outlay, registration, and titling.

Following are factors that should be considered when deciding between leasing or buying:

- The size of the car. Lease rates, purchase prices & operating costs vary greatly with different car sizes. Be sure to compare lease and purchase prices of the same size car.
- The length of time you intend to keep the car. Depreciation costs can amount to as much as 50% of the purchase price of the car in the first 2 years of ownership. By leasing you may be able to avoid some car depreciation losses.
- Whether the lease terms permit you to buy the car at the end of the lease period. By purchasing the car at this time you can avoid the large initial capital outlay needed to buy the car new & can buy a "one owner" used car that you know.
- The amount of driving you intend to do & the costs of insurance in your area. The chief advantages of the full service lease are that all your repairs, maintenance & insurance costs are included in the higher monthly rental charge. But true savings from including these services in a lease may occur only if you drive your car more than a certain mileage per year or live in an area where insurance rates are very high.
- Personal property taxes levied on cars by some cities and states.

A summary of the *Transportation Dept.* study, *Cost of Operating an Automobile*, is available free from *Consumer Product Information*, Washington, DC 20407.

## Hexachlorophene

**Food & Drug Administration** announced on Sept. 22 that it would limit the use of hexachlorophene, the popular antibacterial agent, to products available on prescription by a doctor [CONSUMER REGISTER: Oct. 15]. FDA has now published a *Fact Sheet* to further explain the reasons for the ban & to describe types of products covered by the ban. The *Fact Sheet* is available free by writing to *FDA Fact Sheet*, Food & Drug Administration, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20852.

## 'Tis the season

Food & Drug Administration's Bureau of Product Safety is taking new steps to protect consumers from unsafe Christmas decorations & toys. These steps include (1) a nationwide publicity campaign to educate consumers on toy safety, (2) distribution of 2 new pamphlets on Christmas decorations & children's toys, (3) enforcement actions against highly flammable artificial Christmas trees & (4) development of new & improved safety standards applicable to electrical toys & artificial plastic trees.

- **TOY SAFETY CAMPAIGN**—A nationwide campaign began this month to educate consumers on toy safety. The campaign includes public service announcements on both radio & television, newspaper articles on how to buy safe toys & a color film for showing to community groups. The campaign is being coordinated by 37 FDA consumer specialists throughout the country who are providing the press with up-to-date information on toy safety.

- **PUBLICATIONS**—2 new pamphlets are being made available to the public on both toy safety & general Christmas time safety. The first booklet, *Safe Toy Tips*, includes information on how to choose & use toys. The second pamphlet, *Merry Christmas With Safety*, explains tips on trees, fake snow, lights, candles, trimmings, fire & paper products. For your free copy of each, write to Director, Office of Technical Information & Publications, Bureau of Product Safety, 5401 Westbard Ave., Bethesda, MD 20016.

- **ENFORCEMENT**—Bureau of Product Safety is pressing artificial tree manufacturers to comply with the flammability requirements of the Federal Hazardous Substances Act. Under the law, any product that does not pass certain flammability tests must be labeled "flammable." Bureau officials are advising consumers to look for labels when buying artificial trees: Trees that are in compliance with the flammability regulation are generally labeled "fire proof" or "fire retardant." Also, the bureau will survey stores to look for trees in violation of the law.

The bureau is also advising consumers to consider the make up of artificial trees before buying. There are 2 kinds of plastic trees: Those made of polyvinylchloride (PVC) & those made of polyethylene. The PVC tree—consisting of long needles locked into wire branches—will not burn. On the other hand, the polyethylene tree, which usually appears more natural than the PVC tree, will burn. In comparison with natural trees, however, the polyethylene tree will burn more slowly. Of all trees, the natural tree is the most flammable, capable of bursting into flames in seconds once the tree is dry.

- **NEW STANDARDS**—The bureau has proposed a new standard for electrical toys & is now working on stricter standards applicable to the flammability of artificial Christmas trees.

The proposed regulation to control electrically operated toys, which was announced in the spring [CONSUMER REGISTER: March 1], is expected to be implemented in early 1973 & will cover such electrically operated toys as stoves, irons, corn poppers, candy-making machines, football games, cars & wood-burning kits. Under the proposed regulation, toys not meeting the FDA requirements would be banned. Also, the regulation would require that toys operated at voltages higher than 30 volts must bear the statement "Caution: Electric Toy." It would also set a temperature limit of 150° fahrenheit for electrical toys such as ovens & irons.

In the second area, the bureau is considering proposing a new combustibility regulation, which would give further protection to consumers from flammable artificial trees. The regulation would cover such problems as flame drops (drops of burning plastic that can fall from the tree & set other objects afire), which are not covered under existing standards. It also would require cautionary labeling on more slowly burning trees, which are not now required to be labeled.

### New Federal publication

*Antifreeze/Coolant* (selection, use & maintenance), published by General Services Administration; 20¢; available from Consumer Product Information, Washington, DC 20407.

## If you prefer a real tree . . .

Buying a Christmas tree involves several considerations—just as in shopping for other consumer products. To help consumers with this once-a-year purchase, Agriculture Dept. has compiled some guidelines on how to select & care for a natural Christmas tree.

Here are Agriculture's suggestions about selecting your tree:

- Run your finger down a branch. The needles should adhere to each twig if the tree is fresh. Also, needles should spring back into place. Freshness is an important consideration for 2 reasons: (1) appearance & (2) safety—fresh trees are less of a fire hazard than dry trees.
- Shake or bounce the tree on the ground lightly to see that the needles are firmly attached. If only a few drop off, you have another sign of the tree's freshness.
- Sniff for another sign of freshness—a strong "woody" fragrance.
- Check the limbs; they should be strong enough to hold ornaments & strings of electric lights.

(• And Food & Drug Administration's Bureau of Product Safety adds a footnote: If the tree is very fresh, the trunk butt will be sticky with resin.)

To get your money's worth, you should do more than be a smart shopper. You should give your tree proper care so that it will be healthy & appear fresh during the holiday season. Agriculture suggests these guidelines for Christmas tree care:

- If you buy your tree several days before it is to be set up & decorated, store it outside. Make a diagonal cut across the trunk butt to open the pores. Place the trunk butt in a container of water so the tree can absorb water through the open pores.
- When you are ready to bring the tree into the house, saw the trunk butt again to square off the diagonal so that you can easily place the tree in a stand.
- Use a stand that holds water. Keep the tree trunk butt in the stand of water the entire time it is in the house. Refill the stand daily. Sprinkle water on the needles and branches before you decorate to give the tree a little bit more help in staying fresh.
- Be sure the base of the tree is well supported, & be sure the tree is placed away from fireplaces, radiators, electric heaters, televisions or any other source of heat.
- Never leave your house or apartment with the Christmas tree lights still on. Never use lighted candles—or any other form of flame—on or near your tree.
- Check electric light cords for fraying & worn spots that could cause fires.

Remember: The longer the tree is indoors, the drier it gets—even with daily watering—& the more likely it is to catch fire.

In addition to guidelines for shopping & caring for a Christmas tree, an Agriculture booklet also describes species of trees used for Christmas & explains grades used in ranking tree qualities. The booklet, *How To Buy a Christmas Tree*, is available for 15¢ from Consumer Product Information, Washington, DC 20407.

## Recall report

The following is a summary of Food & Drug Administration's list of products recently recalled. The complete list is available free on a weekly basis from Press Office, Office of the Assistant Commissioner for Public Affairs, Food & Drug Administration, Rockville, MD 20852.

Viviane Woodward medicated soap. Made by Hewitt Soap Co., division of Procter & Gamble Co., Dayton, & distributed by Viviane Woodward Corp., Panorama City, CA. Label says in part: "Clear Future Clear Cake . . . Net Wt. 3 1/4 oz. Contains: Hexachlorophene, Allantoin . . ." Soap made in Sept. 1971 before distributor deleted hexachlorophene from its formula & label in Jan. 1972. Estimate that 200 cakes of soap remain on the market.  
Reason for recall: FDA ban on 1% hexachlorophene content on Sept. 27, 1972 [CONSUMER REGISTER: Oct. 15].  
Procedure: Recall by distributor, initiated by FDA; letter sent to retail stores nationwide.

Gillette Lather Shave Cream with K-34, packaged in 2.5 oz. & 4.5 oz. metal tubes labeled as Gillette Toiletries Co., Boston, & made by The Gillette Co., Toiletries Division, Andover, MA. K-34 is firm's name for hexachlorophene formulation.

Reason for recall: Contains more than .75% hexachlorophene.

Procedure: Letter, initiated by FDA, from Gillette to retailers nationwide.

## Tire companies pay penalty fees

Transportation Dept.'s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports tire companies have agreed to pay penalties in compromise of civil penalty claims for producing tires in violation of the National Traffic & Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966.

Lee Tire & Rubber Co. has agreed to pay \$20,000 in compromise of a civil penalty claim, & Uniroyal Tire Co. has agreed to pay \$5,500.

According to the traffic safety administration, tests on "Turbo-Speed" 9.15x15 tires, made by Lee Tire, showed that 10 out of 13 failed to meet the strength requirements & 8 out of 13 the endurance requirements; one did not meet the high-speed requirements. Tests on Lee "G.S. 300" H78-15 tires showed 2 high-speed failures out of 7 tires tested. The company began a recall in Jan. 1972 whereby drivers using the tires in question were to be notified of the deficiency.

Concerning the Uniroyal Co., tests on "Winter Patrol" 8.25-14 nylon 4-ply tubeless snow tires showed that 6 out of 13 failed endurance requirements. Uniroyal has also initiated a recall campaign.

## Warning about certain GM cars

Transportation Dept.'s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has issued a Consumer Protection Bulletin to warn owners of 1971 & 1972 General Motors cars about the possibility of a steering lock-up.

According to the bulletin, loss of steering & control can result from gravel or rocks becoming lodged between the front lower frame & the steering coupling of certain GM cars. To correct this hazard, GM has advised its dealers to install, under regular warranty coverage, an inexpensive "gravel shield" to cars if consumers request it.

The bulletin cautions owners to drive slowly & with caution on gravel roadways until they obtain a "gravel shield." Cars that may experience steering lock-ups are full sized Pontiacs, Buicks, Oldsmobiles & Chevrolets for the last 2 model years.

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